



Waterfront Work Group

11-17-2008

WHAT IS THIS TOPIC?

Baltimore has approximately 47 miles or perimeter shoreline in a variety of uses and conditions. Much of the shoreline is active industry and has deep water for ships. In 2004 the City created the Maritime Industrial Overlay Zone (MIZOD) to protect the industry needing deep water access from non-industrial uses. This topic is focusing on the non-industrial waterfront areas. Typically this is the waterfront land from Canton Industrial area, through the Inner Harbor to Locust Point. It also includes much of the land in the Middle Branch area.

HOW DO CURRENT APPROACHES IMPACT DEVELOPMENT?

There has been a significant amount of planning and development in these waterfront areas over the last thirty years, including Harbor Place. In many cases the tools to implement these ideas have not been zoning but have been Urban Renewal Overlays and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). These plans have varied in their details and development guidelines but a common theme is the development of a waterfront promenade. This promenade is intended to create continuous public access to the waterfront. Other guidelines include height, massing and view corridors.

WHAT ISSUES WITH THE CURRENT APPROACH SHOULD TRANSFORM BALTIMORE HELP ADDRESS?

- Current approach results in inconsistent waterfront development guidelines.
- Consideration of varying waterfront zones, with different height guidelines?
- What are the best ways to address the challenge of developing waterfront sites given the unique physical characteristics of waterfront land – odd lot sizes/shapes, non rectilinear blocks, and a frequent disconnection from the city street grid.
- Must balance between public goals and private property rights.
- Public should be able to access the waterfront .
- Is zoning the right tool to control or deal with waterfront development due to its unique character?
- How will changes to parking requirements in zoning impact or interact with ongoing negotiations between DOT and Developers?

What's next for the Inner Harbor in order to keep it current?



WHAT PROPOSED APPROACHES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED DURING THE TRANSFORM BALTIMORE PROCESS?

Uses

The waterfront is too valuable to be used for parking. Consider adding parking to FAR calculations in order to discourage parking and/or cap parking in a waterfront area. Consider allowing shared parking, parking maximums and off-site parking for waterfront uses in the zoning code.

Variety of uses seems to work along the waterfront with the exception that auto oriented retail should be limited.

Consider limiting the size of retail spaces along the water to discourage big box or other types of inappropriate waterfront uses.

Along the promenade, consideration should be given to creating nodes of retail and those nodes should be areas close to transit. Density should be also tied to transit.

Design

Consideration should be given to having buildings step back from the waterfront, similar to the way they were in the Inner Harbor.

Concern was expressed about the bulk of podium type buildings especially when they are mostly parking, blocking views and access to the waterfront.

The code needs to recognize that on the waterfront, buildings have no 'backs'. This presents a challenge for service and makes it difficult to always activate building fronts.

Consider limiting the block width along the waterfront to maintain a more open feel.

Consider setback and step-back requirements along the promenade to help promote and preserve the feeling that it is a public space.

Baltimore should consider view shed legislation and whether that may be appropriate. If view corridors are to be used they need to be clearly defined as to what they are and what purpose they are serving. Maybe there should be different types (i.e. how does a view shed differ from a view corridor).

The use of glass was suggested as an appropriate material to encourage along the waterfront because it is reflective and makes buildings appear less “bulky” and intrusive on the landscape.

Explore design guidelines similar to those in Vancouver.



Promenade and Open space

The promenade is a terrific asset and needs to be made more available. Access should be clearer and more visible with entry points and parking well labeled.

Trees should be added for shade and comfort where possible with consideration given to avoid blocking views. Species and location matter.

Waterfront zones vs. Continuous standards

Generally the group thought the promenade and waterfront areas should be reflective of their adjacent communities, but they all should be looked at as part of a whole and not planned in isolation. For example it is important to develop height, massing and designs studies for all the waterfront areas to make sure they work together as a whole.

The Middle Branch should maintain a softer green edge than the bulk head areas near downtown, and provide a linear connection between waterfront parks.

Transit locations need to be considered in developing nodes of density and mixed-use activity.

Consider performance standards in PUDs and explore the use of performance bonds to guarantee compliance with design guidelines and ensure quality. These could also be used to help mitigate conflicts and “buffer” mixed use developments that choose to locate next to industrial uses.

Preserve districts of unique character so there is diversity along the waterfront – zone in existing character in some cases.